

• San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory • Newsletter



Newsletter No. 2

Spring 1983

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THE POWER OF A FLOOD Michael Rigney

Those of us who have witnessed the destructive power of this year's flooding in Alviso will not soon forget these indelible images. With this second edition of our newsletter, we're featuring photos of the flood in all its power, from a stain on the wall to the metaphor of a heavy hand crushing dreams and shattering lives.

The impact of the flood was catastrophic, both visible and immediate. However, as time passes, this natural disaster has become a growth experience. The community closed ranks and channeled an incredible amount of energy to start over.

In the weeks following the storm, rebuilding began. The Bird Observatory played a major role in this recovery by acting as the storage and dispersal center for donated building materials. In this role, we developed an even closer rapport with

community leaders, police and fire personnel, and other city and county officials.

The Bird Observatory also found an inner strength of commitment to its goals. We mobilized small armies of volunteers for cleaning and reordering our Cannery Building in a very short time. Our relocation to the second floor will give us a larger and even better place to carry on daily business. We also appreciate the help from many of you in contributing your time and money.

So that this experience is not lost in our memory, we're establishing a flood display in our building. We hope to recapture the many awesome aspects of "the power of a flood," and dedicate it to our community, our members and the indomitable will that the Bird Observatory will survive and flourish.



Editorial Staff: Lorraine Emery, Virginia Bennett, Russ Fowler

PROJECTS THAT NEED VOLUNTEER HELP
Julie Klingmann

The Bird Observatory has numerous ongoing research projects and there are many ways for volunteers to get involved. Here's a great chance to put your birding skills to use, to learn about the Bay area, and to have fun.

California Gull Study: Theresa Rigney, Project Leader. Theresa has scheduled a night census every fifth night from May through July. This group will be counting nests, eggs, and young, and banding the chicks. Call Theresa (408) 867-3791 (evenings) if you would like to help.

Palo Alto Airport Study: Ginny Becchine, Project Manager. Five more census dates are scheduled throughout the year in the Palo Alto Baylands. The next census is May 14, at 8 a.m. Meet at the Baylands Interpretive Center. Project leaders will also be scheduling observation sessions to observe and record bird/plane interactions. Call Ginny (415) 968-4875 for more information.

The Colonial Bird Census: Tim Gates and Jennifer Browning, Project Leaders. This group will walk through the known Forster's and Caspian Tern colonies during the breeding season. Eggs, nests, chicks, and adults will be counted and the information will be sent to Cornell on Colonial Bird Register forms.

Artesian Slough: Dave Jensen, Project Leader. Birds in the marsh areas around Artesian Slough will be counted and banded during this year-long contract study.

Bair Island: Julie Klingmann, Project Manager. Several project leaders will coordinate efforts to take a census of all birds on the island. A more concentrated study will be made of the Least Tern Colony, and some Great Blue Heron and Black-crowned Night-Heron young will be banded (March-August).

Clapper Rail: San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Biologists Roy Lowe and Tom Harvey plan a study of Clapper Rails in the South Bay and will need volunteer help.

Botulism Study: Project leader needed. This study monitors the presence of (avian) Clostridium Botulinum Type C toxin in Artesian Slough and Coyote Creek. This project will begin in mid-June and continue through mid-October.

Snowy Plover Census: Project leader needed. This is a cooperative project with the Point Reyes Bird Observatory which includes a state-wide census of Snowy Plovers. The Bird Observatory will be involved in color-banding and observations of Snowy Plovers in the south San Francisco Bay.

There is a sign-up book at the Bird Observatory and at the general meetings. Call (408) 946-6548 for more information.

SFBBO PLANS NATIVE PLANT AND POND HABITAT
Vicki Knirck

A grounds development committee will draw up plans for the large open field next to the Bird Observatory. We plan to use the field for a bird-banding station to train students and members in bird-banding techniques, and as an outdoor teaching aid and work area for education programs.

We would like to include a large pond to provide a water source that will attract birds year-round. Native California plants will be grown to provide food and shelter for various species of birds.

We need help with all phases of this project. If you like working outdoors, enjoy gardening, or have an interest or background in landscape design, please call Vicki Knirck (408) 947-0695 (evenings), or Kathy Hobson at SFBBO.

BIRD BANDING: A PERSONAL VIEW
Tim Gates

Recently I volunteered to participate in the banding workshops sponsored by the SFBBO and, to my surprise, found that banding a second-year Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow was as exciting to me as birding during high tide at Baylands. The Gambel's is one of two races of White-crowned Sparrows that we banded, and only one of a variety of species.

Working in teams of two, the bander first bands and then reports the data to the recorder who codes it on the record data sheet. This form is used by SFBBO to record precise information about the birds such as wing measurements, weight, age, sex, body fat and molt as well as where captured. At first inspection this form appears to be a conglomerate of rows, columns, numbers, letters and alphanumeric. It is easily mastered, however, and its computer compatibility makes it an excellent tool for SFBBO data entry.

A person banding his first bird encounters strange feelings. The bander (I speak for myself) is rather perplexed and clumsy getting the bird out of the net or keeping the band in the pliers while ignoring the pain from a blackbird's claws digging into a finger. On the other hand, it is a surprise to find that the bird is not always frightened out of its wits when captured; it may be alert and defensive, trying many times to escape.

The workshops, organized and directed by Dr. Mewaldt, are extremely useful in gaining new insights into the bird world. In these sessions we learn such interesting things as the age determination of Starlings by measuring the length of iridescence on their throat feathers, the sequence of pre-nuptial molt of a White-crowned Sparrow and why the central pair of feathers differ from the other ten tail feathers. We also learn standardized procedures including how and where to set traps and nets, and how to summarize the data.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR OURSELVES
AND OUR FUTURE

Peter Siminski, Education Coordinator

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER
Tom Rountree

Early studies of bird life of the San Francisco Bay by the Bird Observatory have given us some valuable information about the wildlife populations in our area. We plan to use this information in our education programs to acquaint the public with birds of the Bay, and to encourage involvement in and concern with the Bay and its inhabitants. Hopefully, as people become aware of our programs and projects, they'll also want to become involved.

Workshops, lectures, and other activities will be provided both at SFBBO and elsewhere to educate members and build a competent, effective and confident member volunteer force.

The Bird Banding Workshop, led by Dr. Richard Mewaldt, has been meeting for several months and teaches members to become qualified banders. Other proposed future classes and workshops include bird identification, marsh ecology, marsh plant identification, wildlife emergency care, optics for birders, and photography.

A tour of the facilities is conducted the second and last Saturday of each month at the Bird Observatory facilities in Alviso's historic Bayside Cannery Building. This is followed by a two-mile bird walk on the neighboring levees for beginning bird watchers. Tours start at 8 a.m. and the bird walk ends by noon. This is a terrific opportunity for members and non-members to learn about the Observatory. No registration is required.

The Bird Study for High School Students program is a six-session course introducing young adults to the special rewards of field research. Studies include the nesting biology of Avocets and Black-necked Stilts on the levee near SFBBO headquarters. Registration is required.

Field trips by Nature Explorations are planned for May 7 and May 20 (fee: \$20). Michael Rigney, SFBBO Executive Director, will lead groups to study Bair Island's nesting birds. This is one of a few programs planned in cooperation with other environmental groups to expand our offerings.

The Observatory is now a member of the Midpeninsula Environmental Education Alliance, an association of 20 diverse non-profit groups dedicated to environmental education. We've also had requests from the S.F. Bay National Wildlife Refuge for bird banding demonstrations.

If you wish further information or want to participate in any of these programs, please call the Observatory.

In our last newsletter I reported that SFBBO was making outstanding progress in attracting new members, in starting new projects, and in refurbishing the old Bayside Cannery into a beautiful, functional building of which members could be proud.

During the first week of March, however, much of that early optimism had dimmed. Torrential rains swelled to overflowing on the already full Coyote Creek, levees broke, and within a few short hours, the town of Alviso and the SFBBO offices were under seven feet of water.

Cleanup parties report that much was ruined: desks, bookcases, file cabinets, research equipment, reports, maps and many volumes of scientific journals.

The one thing that wasn't damaged, however, was our faith in the Bird Observatory and our determination to pick up the pieces and build an even better organization than we had before.

Mike Rigney reports that work has begun cleaning up, salvaging, and building a new set of offices and the library upstairs. (See other articles in this issue.) Julie Klingmann asserts that all research projects are moving forward and we should be on schedule for various timetables and goals. Suzie Formenti said that old and new members alike are enthusiastically volunteering for projects.

And I'm happy to report that many members and nonmembers have opened their wallets a little wider and contributed generously to the Bird Observatory's Flood Relief Fund. Won't you, too, consider donating a few extra dollars to SFBBO? It's your bird observatory and it's the only one we've got here in the South Bay.



Flood photos by Michael Dressler

Deadline for photo/editorial submission

for August issue is July 1

The regular meeting of the SFBBO is the first Thursday of each month at 7:30 p.m. The meetings often feature slide programs by members of the Observatory. The meetings are held at the S.F. Bay National Wildlife Refuge Educational Center in Alviso.

The Observatory Library is now located on the second floor of our Cannery building, protected from flooding below and a leaking roof above.

In rebuilding the library, we can use your help. We can use wildlife and natural history texts and reference books. Also our Education Program is in need of field guides, both new and outdated.

We are looking for individuals who might be interested in sponsoring a journal for the SFBBO. When you subscribe to the journal, have it sent to the SFBBO Library, and take a tax deduction. We will acknowledge the donation with your name in the front of the journals.

The Auk (American Ornithologists Union)
 Quarterly, \$16 New membership
 Dr. Kenneth Able, Treas.
 P.O. Box 44, Berne, N.Y. 12023

The Condor (Cooper Ornithological Society)
 Quarterly, \$18 membership
 Dr. Charles Collins, Treas.
 Dept. of Biology, Cal State Univ.
 Long Beach, Calif. 90840

Wilson's Bulletin (Wilson Ornithological Soc.)
 Quarterly, \$16 membership
 Dr. Keith Bildstein
 Dept. Biology, Winthrop College
 Rock Hill, S. Carolina 29733

No. Am. Bird Bander (W. Bird Banding Assoc.)
 Quarterly, \$8 Associate member
 Jane P. Church, Treas.
 Box 38, Sonoita, Ariz. 85637

The Journal of Field Ornithology
 (N.E. Bird Banding Association)
 Quarterly, \$10 membership
 Membership Secretary
 Box 797, Manomet, Mass. 02345

Bent's Life Histories, a paperback series of bird life histories, published by Dover Publishing and available at The Nature Company and other bookstores.

If you have further questions, call Mike Rigney at SFBBO.

While a gallant effort was made to rescue everything from the flood, little was actually saved. Many items were originally donated, and we hope to find replacements. Keep us in mind during your Spring cleaning!

Office Equipment:

- Desks
- Chairs
- Bookcases
- Tables
- Storage cabinets
- Filing cabinets
- Typewriter(s)
- Desk lamps
- Clock
- Shelving
- Area rugs
- Bulletin boards

Office Supplies:

- Typing paper
- Graph paper
- Push pins
- Binders
- Calendars
- Staplers
- Scissors
- Clip boards
- File folders
- Cleaning products

Research Material:

- Ornithological journals
- Ornithological books
- Photographs
- Maps of the bay

Miscellaneous:

- Extension cords
- Hand tools
- Power tools
- Freezer
- Flashlights
- Coffee pot

DONATIONS

Many thanks to the following for their donations to SFBBO:

- Doug and Dodie Franklin ----- Refrigerator
- Bob Garcia-Windward ----- Ceiling, door, lights
- Construction Co.
- Alviso Reorganization ----- Sheetrock
- Committee
- S.F. Bay National Wildlife -- Dumpster
- Refuge
- Grant and Lynn Hoyt ----- Spotting scope
- Tom Moore ----- Table and chairs
- Tom of Laine's Antiques ----- Items for flood museum
- Juanita Heinemann ----- Wildflower seeds

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The San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory is a non-profit corporation. All memberships and contributions are tax deductible. Membership classes:

- Student/Senior \$10 annually
- Regular \$15 annually
- Family \$20 annually
- Associate \$50 annually
- Contributing \$100 annually
- Sustaining \$200 annually
- Life Member \$400 *
- Patron \$2000 *
- Corporate \$500+annually

* Single payment becomes part of endowment fund.